

## **I Need a Coffee: Pragmalinguistic Variation of Starbucks Service Encounter Requests According to Interaction Modality**

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### **Abstract**

The present study explores the pragmalinguistic variation of request forms found in Starbucks café service encounters. Pragmatic variation in service encounters has been examined from a variety of perspectives in the literature (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015; Placencia, 1998; Shively, 2011; Ventola, 1987). Using a revised variational pragmatics framework (Schneider & Barron, 2008; Barron & Schneider, 2009; Schneider, 2010), the current study analyzes 820 instances of request forms (conventional indirect, assertion, imperative, want, need, elliptical/verbless requests) produced in a Starbucks café service encounters in the northwestern United States. Each request token was analyzed according to the gender of the participants involved (customer/barista) and according to the modality of the discourse (face-to-face/drive-through microphone). This study provides a first attempt to consider the affect of the gender of service encounter participants in conjunction with the modality of the interaction. Quantitative analysis shows that both participant gender and the interaction's modality affect the request forms produced in Starbucks service encounters.

**Keywords:** service encounter, pragmalinguistic variation, request, modality

## 1. Introduction

The present study explores the pragmalinguistic variation of request forms found in Starbucks café service encounters. Pragmalinguistic variation in service encounters is an area which has been well examined in the literature (Bailey, 2000; Callahan, 2009; Drew & Heritage, 1992; Félix-Brasdefer, 2015; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005; Kidwell, 2000; Gavioli, 1995; Lamoureux, 1988; Márquez Reiter and Placencia, 2004; Placencia, 1998; Shively, 2011; Ventola, 1987). A service encounter may be operationalized as a structured, single topic interaction oriented toward a goal (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Kidwell, 2000; Shively, 2011; Ventola, 1987). The café environment forms a subset of service encounter interactions and the present study analyzes these encounters within the context of Starbucks cafés. Specific trends in the language used in Starbucks service encounters result from the unique culture that Starbucks fosters in a purposeful attempt to distinguish itself from other cafés (Gulati, Huffman & Neilson, 2008). To discover the pragmatic variation of request forms in Starbucks service encounters, the current study analyzes variant forms of requests according to the gender of the participants involved in the interactions (customer/barista) and according to the modality of the discourse (face-to-face/drive-through microphone). A revised variational pragmatics framework (Schneider & Barron, 2008; Barron & Schneider, 2009; Schneider, 2010) is employed for the analysis of the current data, following Fink and Félix-Brasdefer (2015) in their research of pragmatic variation in a local coffee shop. This revised variational pragmatics framework is appropriate for the present study because of the way in which it provides a means of accounting for the way in which language use is affected by gender. Additionally, this framework allows us to investigate the variation at a specific level of pragmatics, the actional level. In other words, this study analyzes the linguistic means of performing the action of a specific speech act, the request for service.

While previous studies have focused on request form variation according to gender in local coffee shops (Barlett, 2005; Fink & Félix-Brasdefer, 2015; Heine, 2011), the current study expands upon prior research in two ways. Firstly, it analyzes the formation of requests for a product in the specific setting of a Starbucks café due to the prestige associated with said brand and the clientele it consequently attracts. Secondly, the current study takes into account the modality of the observed utterances in order to determine if the request forms differ between face-to-face interactions and those carried out over a microphone in drive-through orders. A revised variational pragmatics framework (Schneider & Barron, 2008; Barron & Schneider, 2009; Schneider, 2010) is employed for the analysis of the current data, following Fink and Félix-Brasdefer (2015) in their research of pragmatic variation in a local coffee shop. This framework allows for an analysis of pragmatic variation at the actional level, which refers to the linguistic means of performing a specific

speech act, in this case the request for service. It also provides a means to account for the way in which language use is affected by gender.

The study is organized as follows: firstly, an overview of the previous literature is provided, outlining key trends in service encounter research in general, and the Starbucks café context, specifically. Secondly, the method and context of data collection are presented followed by an explanation of how the data were analyzed. Results are then presented quantitatively and discussed in light of the previous research in order to draw final conclusions and present possible avenues of future research.

## **2. Review of literature**

### **2.1 Service encounter research**

The area of service encounters provides a compelling realm of pragmatic inquiry in which researchers investigate the structure of said interactions, differences according to social and cultural factors, the acquisition of pragmatic knowledge by learners, among other factors. As stated above, service encounters are operationalized as a structured, single topic interaction oriented toward a goal (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Kidwell, 2000; Shively, 2011; Ventola, 1987). Coupland (2000) elaborates on this definition by describing a service encounter as an interaction that is motivated toward a transactional or instrumental end and whose participants, most typically strangers (customer and cashier), greet one another and shortly thereafter take leave of one another. Like a conversation, these interactions are structured, containing a beginning, middle, and end in which participants work together to carry out a determined task (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Shively (2011) outlines the elements of which a service encounter is typically comprised of the components displayed in 1 below:

- (1)
  - i. Opening
  - ii. Request for product
  - iii. Optional negotiation
  - iv. Provision of product or service
  - v. Payment
  - vi. Closing

This study focuses specifically on step two of Shively's (2011) outline of service encounter elements, the request for product. As is apparent above in (1), service encounters are typically carried out in a particular order, with the request for a product occurring after an opening sequence. However, Barlett (2005) explains that the manner of completing a service encounter is subject to variation due to a variety of factors which include, but are not limited to, the sociocultural context, the gender of the participants, and sociopragmatic knowledge of the interlocutors. The current study examines the

pragmalinguistic variation of request formation in Starbucks service encounters based on the gender of the participants and the modality of the interaction. Prior to examining these two independent variables however, a clear understanding is necessary of the speech act here examined, the request for service.

Requests are described as one of the principal components of service encounters and are divided into two categories: 1) “requests for action (give me a X)” and 2) “requests for information (do you have X?/how much is X?)” (Antonopoulou, 2001). Requests in service encounters may be formulated using tactics of either positive or negative politeness, the selection of which is determined by context and degree of familiarity between interlocutors (Antonopoulou, 2001). The present study analyzes requests for action in the specific context of Starbucks café service encounters as is affected by speaker gender and the modality of the interaction.

The formation of requests in service encounters conducted in American English are reported to be speaker-oriented in nature (Pinto, 2002; Vélez, 1987). A number of studies have addressed the differences in pragmatic norms in service encounters across cultures, including the degree of directness in the request, the formality employed, and deference (Bailey, 2000; Callahan, 2009; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005; Gavioli, 1995; Lamoureux, 1988; Márquez Reiter and Placencia, 2004; Placencia, 1998), yet this study will focus on American English service encounter requests in Starbucks cafés. Both Pinto (2002) and Vélez (1987) attest to the frequent use of want statements, need statements and conventionally indirect requests in service encounters conducted in American English (see Table 1 for examples of each request type here mentioned). Furthermore, Vélez (1987) reports an absence of elliptical (verbless) requests in his data, attesting to the American desire for requests to be formed in an explicit fashion. While very few elliptical requests were found in Vélez’s data, the Starbucks café service encounter context may demonstrate differing pragmatic norms from other café service encounters or service encounters of another nature (i.e. bank tellers). As such, it is necessary that the context of a service encounter be delineated in order for an adequate understanding of the linguistic trends there observed.

The study of service encounters in a clearly defined context allows for the investigator to examine the inferences participants hold in the given situation regarding the nature of the information exchanged (Shively, 2011). Merritt’s (1976) investigation of customer-request/server-response sequences in the service encounters of a university convenience store provides the sequential structure of such an interaction and gives insight as to the role of pragmatic inference in the response to a question (*Do you have coffee?*) with a question (*Cream and sugar?* [starts to pour coffee]), as opposed to an answer (*Yes.*). Number 2 below presents one of Merritt’s examples from her corpus on service encounters at US convenience stores. The exchange outlines the inferences made on the part of both speakers with the response to the customer’s (C) question with a question on the part of the server (S) (1976, pp.

327). The inferences contained within the box are said to allow for the answer provided, outside the box.

- (2) C: Do you have coffee to go?  
 S: Yes we do.  
 C: All right, can I have a cup please?  
 S: O.K. You want cream and sugar?

The sequence in (2) above provides one possible example of how a request sequence may vary due to inferences allowed for by the context of an interaction. Merritt explains that the highly specific nature of the interaction (a request for coffee) allows for a greater degree of inferences to be drawn by the interlocutors, thus allowing the participants to eliminate the inferred portions of the interaction and employ elliptical requests or utterances. This instance highlights the importance of defining the context of a service encounter interaction prior to conducting an investigation.

Within a specific service encounter setting, such as the café context, pragmalinguistic variation in request forms may occur due to a variety of factors, one of which is the gender of the interlocutors. The influence of the gender of the interaction's participants on request variants has been studied both in the United States and other countries. In the U.S. context, Fink and Félix-Brasdefer (2015) present local coffee shop service encounters from a variational pragmatics approach in which both customer productions and barista perceptions of request forms were considered. Approximately 25 hours of service encounter request sequences produced in American English were recorded using field notes in a local café near a large Midwestern university. Additionally, baristas completed a questionnaire in which they rated request sequences on a 5-point Likert scale according to their perception of (im)politeness of the interaction. Request variants were analyzed according to the gender of the participants (Customer -Barista: M-M, M-F, F-M, or F-F), as well as according to internal and external modifications used in the interactions. Results show that the gender of the participants influenced both the production and perception of requests provided by customers.

## 2.2 Gender differences in service encounters

In another work exploring gender-based variation in service encounters both in the U.S. and Mexico, Félix-Brasdefer (2015) employs a discursive pragmatic approach to analyze naturally occurring face-to-face interactions in both commercial and non-commercial service encounters. Results show that males and females produce different request variants (pp. 150-51), employ pronominal forms distinctly (pp. 207-09), and use vocatives differently in service encounter interactions in Mexico (pp. 209-12). The Mexican data provided show that males employ imperative and elliptical forms at higher frequencies than females, whereas females utilize more implicit requests and

assertions in service encounter interactions in market sales. Therefore it is found that gender-based linguistic differences exist in service encounters not only in American English, but in other linguistic varieties as well.

Verifying the influence of customer gender in service encounter speech as shown above, Antonopoulou (2001) analyzed the differences in requests produced by males and females in a small convenience-type shop in Athens, Greece. Transactions involving a total of 180 male and 200 female customers in interactions with 1 male and 1 female shop employee show that differences between male and female politeness strategies do indeed exist and that these are more complex than had been previously proposed (e.g. Holmes, 1995). Male participants viewed a service encounter merely as a transaction that did not require opening and closing exchanges for the maintenance of face of either participant. This perception was purported to lead to the higher percentages of elliptical and silent requests on part of the males. The females, however, perceived opening and closing interaction between participants as a necessary component of the service encounter, such that greetings, partings, and expressions of thanks were offered by females over the course of the encounter in addition to fully verbalized requests. Results from Antonopoulou (2001) therefore suggest that there do indeed exist differences in request variants selected by males and females in face-to-face service encounter interactions in Greece.

These previous studies show that the gender of participants does influence the way in which service encounters are conducted linguistically both in the U.S. and in other regions of the world. It has been proposed that males and female perceive service encounter transactions differently, thus leading to distinct linguistic strategies in such interactions. Each of the above studies, while analyzing unique service encounter contexts, investigates speech production only in the face-to-face modality. The current study builds upon this previous work on gender in service encounters by analyzing how the gender of the participants involved in service encounters in a U.S. Starbucks café affects request variants.

The research here presented has revealed certain patterns that inform the questions asked in the current study. Firstly, that the genre of service encounters demonstrates specific pragmatic norms that depend not only on the culture of the interlocutors, but also on the particular type of service encounter (restaurant, bank, coffee shop, etcetera) and possibly even specific business (i.e. Starbucks). Secondly, the request forms produced in service encounters vary according to the gender of the individual formulating the request. As no previous research surrounding the effect of modality on the pragmalinguistic variation of service encounters, the present study does analyze this variable. The current study in like manner with Fink and Félix -Brasdefer (2015), employs a revised variational pragmatics framework in the analysis of the present data (Schneider, 2010) in order to analyze the actional level of the pragmatic variation in request formation. Within the variational pragmatics framework, five social factors affecting language use are delineated: 1) social

class, 2) region, 3) ethnicity, 4) gender, and 5) age. In addition to these social factors influencing communication, five levels of pragmatics are also proposed: 1) the formal level which studies the way linguistic forms are utilized within a context, 2) the actional level which considers the way in which particular speech acts are carried out linguistically, 3) the interactional level which investigates sequences of speech or speech events, 4) the topic level which analyzes topics of discussion, and finally, 5) the organizational level which studies how interlocutors take turns in discourse. This revised variational pragmatics framework is appropriate for the present study because of the way in which it provides a means of accounting for the way in which language use is affected by gender, one of the five social factors mentioned above. Additionally, this framework allows for the investigation of variation at a specific level of pragmatics. This study analyzes pragmatic variation at the actional level, investigating the linguistic means of performing a request for service in a Starbucks café service encounter.

In this section, a service encounter has been presented as a structured, single topic interaction oriented toward a goal. Requests for service were presented as a component of said structure, and divided into two categories: 1) requests for action, and 2) requests for information. Of these two types, the current study analyzes the former. The previous literature has shown that a number of factors give rise to variation in the language employed in service encounters. To adequately account for such variation, one must clearly define the context of the service encounter to be studied and analyze causes for variation within that delimited context. This study analyzes how two independent variables, participant gender and interaction modality, and their affect on variation of linguistic forms in requests for action within the context of Starbucks café service encounters. An overview of previous research on gender in service encounters has shown that males and females employ differing linguistic behavior in face-to-face service encounters both in American English and other languages. This study expands upon previous studies by exploring how request forms vary in Starbucks café service encounters based on the gender of the participants. Prior to exploring the particulars of the current study, however, it is first necessary to lay a foundation of research conducted on both café service encounters and the Starbucks café environment.

### **2.3 Café service encounter research**

Café service encounter research has been approached through various theoretical approximations. Employing a conversation analysis approach (Saks et al., 1974; Schegloff, 2007) in coffee shop service encounters, Barlett (2005) analyzes native speaker to native speaker interactions, claiming that service encounters contain both specialized and semi-specialized language domains. As such, service encounters require certain elements for successful completion. Through the analysis of naturalistic recorded discourse in three

coffee shops and one coffee cart, the author shows that while the nature of service encounters is complex and contains variability, that there exist predictable tendencies that can be described. The author concludes that service encounters are of a highly complex nature, possessing both fixed and variable elements. The finesse involved in completing a service encounter interaction in the café context requires cultural competence and linguistic flexibility, as is evident when the conversation is studied as a whole.

In a sociological analysis of the café environment, Laurier (2012) describes how customer/barista service encounters are influenced through the creation of a specific community, which is formed between the baristas and the 'regular' customers. The author outlines the asymmetry of the relationship in which the barista knows the customer in what he considers a more intimate way by interacting with the individual in a context of how they spend their time in their personal life, while the customer knows the barista in the environment of their employment. This combination of intimacy and asymmetry of relationship between the regular customer and the barista is, according to Laurier, a central component of café culture and the service encounters therein. Starbucks, however, with its wide-reaching business model, presents a new conceptualization of the concept of a regular in that the customer should be able to enter any Starbucks in the world and receive a similar experience, thus being a regular of the chain rather than of a specific local. The difference, therefore, in being a regular customer at Starbucks is unique from that of other café contexts.

In a subsequent publication in *Café Society*, Laurier (2013) describes the role of the barista in a service encounter as more similar to that of a bank teller (Harper, Randall & Rouncefield, 2000) or a small shop employee (Meritt, 1976; Moore, 2008) rather than like that of other workers in the food industry (i.e. a restaurant counter or behind a bar). The author states that this similarity is due to the nature of the interaction, such that the transaction occurs at the time (or even before) the item is provided. This contrasts with typical restaurant service encounters where the waiter interacts with the customer for a duration of time so as to receive a tip after the service has been provided. Through this study, it becomes apparent that the café service encounter context is unique from other kinds of food service interactions and must be studied as such.

Using a Construction Grammar framework, Hein (2011) analyzes the correlation between various forms with which an employee may offer a good to a client in a service encounter. The author describes Construction Grammar as an appropriate approach to the analysis due to its ability to incorporate pragmatic considerations into a semantic account of the offering/consumption of goods. Hein's account regarding the question forms an employee may use in offering a service to a client in an encounter provides insight into one side of the employee-customer interaction involved in the service encounter context. The author refers to the *coffee construction*, or rather the extremely reduced form (i) of the initial question (v), as shown below in (3).



- (3)
- i. Would you like some coffee?
  - ii. You like some coffee?
  - iii. Like some coffee?
  - iv. Some coffee?
  - v. Coffee?

Explaining the difference between these variants of requests, Heine (2011) states:

The longer forms are rather free and in usage only restricted by pragmatic constraints, while the coffee construction is restricted to consumption items, a deviation from which creates a marked stylistic effect. So, although there are similarities among the constructions which indicate partial inheritance relations, the particular use of the coffee construction displays a much narrower form-meaning correspondence. (p. 78)

Results show that reduction of the question ‘*Would you like/Do you want [NP]?*’ carries pragmatic significance, conveying the degree of formality the interlocutors associate with the situation. The present study investigates the other side of the interaction described above by analyzing the way in which a customer formulates a drink request when addressing the barista.

Finally, in a study researching café service encounters with a revised variational pragmatics approach (Schneider & Barron, 2008; Barron & Schneider, 2009; Schneider, 2010), Fink and Félix-Brasdefer (2015) present local American coffee shop service encounters in which both customer productions and barista perceptions of request forms are considered. This framework allowed for researchers to account for the way in which language use in café service encounters was affected by gender. Additionally, this framework permitted for the investigation of variation at the actional level of pragmatics, focusing on requests for service. As mentioned above, in the recorded hours of service encounter request sequences and the questionnaires completed by the baristas, it was found that the gender of the participants influenced both production and perception of requests. Coupland’s (2010) accommodation theory was used to expound on possible reasons for these gender-based differences of barista perceptions of request forms. By employing a similar approach to data analysis in the current study, certain comparisons may be drawn between the language produced in requests for service in local cafés as compared to a Starbucks café. This study expands upon Fink and Félix-Brasdefer (2015) by using a similar revised variational pragmatics approach to analyze the pragmalinguistic variation found in Starbucks café service encounters.

The studies presented in this section have evidenced certain particularities to café service encounters, interactions that demonstrate a combination of fixed and variable elements in their successful completion. As opposed to

service encounters of another nature, it has been found that café service encounters differ from those of other businesses in the food service industry because of the time frame in which the product is provided. The rapport built between a customer and a barista is based on the notion of a 'regular' where in a restaurant setting the relationship between a customer and a waiter may be established over the duration of a meal. Finally, the above research shows that the relationship between the participants in a service encounter is also influenced by the gender of said individuals. The perception and production of requests for service is evaluated differently by males and females, showing that the factors involved in determining linguistic forms are various: social, contextual, and linguistic. The prestige associated with Starbucks makes it an interesting setting for the study of these factors in relation to one another.

## **2.4 Starbucks café context**

In situating the current study within the previous literature, it is important to understand the specific context of Starbucks. The company seeks to market a "coffeehouse experience", using a business model specifically designed to distinguish Starbucks cafés from other coffee shops. Gulafi et al. (2008) describes that language forms an integral part in the creation of the Starbucks experience. Part of this experience involves a barista beginning each interaction with a customer in the drive-through or the lobby with a greeting and an invitation to order, for example: "Welcome to Starbucks! What can I get started for you today?" Sandstrom and Dunn (2013) further analyze the interactions between baristas and customers in Starbucks service encounters showing that the creation of the Starbucks experience involves relational work between the barista and the customer throughout the interaction.

The formation of a distinct "Starbucks Experience" has resulted in the routinization of certain linguistic norms in requests for service at a Starbucks. Such context-specific patterns are exemplified in the sequential order in which a Starbucks drink must be requested: Decaf, Shots, Syrup, Milk, Custom, Drink. For example, Decaf, Single, Venti, 4 pump Raspberry, Non-Fat, Extra foam, Latte. The importance of following this linguistic protocol is explored by Manning (2008) who uses Conversation Analysis to explore issues of 'talk'. Manning examines how Starbucks baristas narrate interactions or "rants" relating 'stupid customer of the week' stories on an online barista community web site. The author extrapolates on the elements of power and prestige involved in the highly specific manner in which the request for a drink must be made at Starbucks, and the way in which failing to follow such protocol may negatively reflect upon the non-compliant or uninformed individual and, in particularly notable cases, result in a story being posted online. In addition, rants are shared regarding those customers who the barista perceives as impolite in their manner of interacting, evidencing baristas' assumption of egalitarianism between customer and employee in an

interaction. When these notions of social equality are usurped, the barista is unable to react against the customer in a face-to-face manner, and thus turns to an online forum which provides a space for anonymous self-expression within a shared community. Various elements of the specific expectations of service encounter interactions within the Starbucks context are presented in this study.

Given the prominent influence of Starbucks as a multinational company, Sifianou's (2012) analysis of the effect of globalization on service encounters proves insightful. The author cites Cameron's (2003) extrapolation of the new conceptualization of 'customer care' present in contemporary global society. This idea centers on the assumption that to care for a customer adequately, a service does not merely need to be offered in a professional manner, but also in a friendly way. This philosophy influences the language employed in service encounters, often manifesting itself in an informal register and coupled with addressing customers by first name in order to convey the friendly demeanor 'customer care' requires (Sifianou, 2012). Cameron (2003) posits that the positive politeness tactics frequently manifested in scripted greetings and the unconditional warmth on part of the employee may perhaps spread beyond the English-speaking world by means of globalization. Sifianou (2012) counters this possibility by saying that even while globalization may spread the reach of a single company, that this does not necessarily entail all of the cultural practices of the base country. Rather, the author states that "foreign practices are frequently adapted to suit culture-bound practices and values rather than just being adopted or ignored wholesale". I address the ideas of Sifianou (2012) and Cameron (2003) to highlight that while the current study involves the analysis of the discourse of Starbucks service encounters, the present data were gathered in one local branch of the larger multinational corporation. Just as Sifianou (2012) states that while there may be certain tendencies that flow from the base country to the recipient countries in multinational businesses, that local norms are not totally subsumed under said influence. While the current study takes place in the United States, it must be remembered that the data is reflective of the norms present in the local culture and not of the country as a whole.

The literature presented in this section has provided an understanding of the culture fostered in Starbucks cafés. The marketing of the "Starbucks Experience" has resulted in a certain level of codification of language exchanged between customers and baristas, the correct use of which results in a sense of belonging on the part of the customer. While certain standards do exist company-wide, it has also been pointed out that these norms are not impervious to the influence of local culture. The purpose of this study is to merge the work conducted specifically on the Starbucks culture with studies on café service encounters, discovering the way in which the gender of the participants and the modality of the interactions affect the way in which Starbucks customers produce requests for service. There seems to be no service encounter research to date that addresses the issue of how the modality of the interaction affects the pragmalinguistic variation involved. Modality

here is defined as the physical context of the service encounter, either face-to-face or via the drive-through microphone. A primary contribution of this study is to address how U.S. café service encounters demonstrate pragmalinguistic variation according to participant gender in conjunction with the modality of the interaction.

The following research questions guided the present study:

- 1) What are the request form variants used in Starbucks café service encounters?
- 2) Is the distribution of request form variants affected by the gender of the participants (i.e. both the customer and the barista) in Starbucks café service encounters?
- 3) Is the distribution of request form variants affected by the modality of the interaction (i.e. face-to-face vs. drive-through) in Starbucks café service encounters?

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1 Data collection and setting**

A total of 820 tokens were gathered at a Starbucks in a northwest Montana city of roughly 20,000 inhabitants during the fall of 2010. This particular Starbucks is a frequent stop for tourists visiting a nearby National Park, although many local customers comprise a large portion of the clientele as well. Each token was coded for the request form (conventional indirect, assertion, want statement, need statement, or elliptical/verbless request), modality of the request (face-to-face vs. microphone), and gender of the participants (Customer -Barista: M-M, M-F, F-M, or F-F). Since the investigator was an employee of Starbucks at the time of the data collection and gathered the data while working, a field note method of recording customer request forms was employed. After careful attention to the request variants employed by customers, the researcher made a spreadsheet of the variants observed, adding additional forms over the course of data collection as they appeared. In cases in which multiple requests were made by a single customer, only the first request was included in the data in order to achieve the most accurate representation of the trends here examined. The final list of variants was modeled after Fink and Félix -Brasdefer (2015) and included: *can*, *could*, *may*, *will*, *going to*, *let*, *give*, *will*, *want*, *would like*, *need*, and *elliptical*. Immediately after the completion of a transaction, the investigator would put a tally in the appropriate cell of the spreadsheet according to customer gender, barista gender, modality of the interaction and request variant.

It should be noted that the female to male employee ratio at the time of data collection at this particular Starbucks was 3 to 1 and, hence, there are many more tokens for requests directed to female baristas. As the researcher is a woman, collection of data from requests directed to the researcher represent a large portion of the female barista tokens. Furthermore, while it was possible

to gather instances of male barista tokens in the drive-through because all employees wear a headset while on the clock, collecting male barista tokens in the lobby proved much more difficult due to the duties of the investigator while working elsewhere in the store (not directly beside the male barista stationed at the lobby cash register). These logistical difficulties result in the large discrepancy of tokens between male and female baristas in the data. It is assumed, however, that insightful conclusions may still be drawn from this data, particularly in comparing the effect of modality in the female barista tokens (as they are not enough to allow for the analysis of the effect of modality for male barista tokens).

### 3.2 Data Analysis

In order to study variation at the actional level of pragmatics found in request forms used in Starbucks service encounters, the following classification was used following Fink and Félix-Brasdefer (2015): Conventional indirect requests included requests beginning with can, could, and may. Assertions were performed with such forms as: will, going to, and let. Imperatives included the sole variant of give. Want forms included those of would like, while need and elliptical requests were comprised of a single corresponding variant respectively. Table 1 shows the categorization of request forms used in the present study, providing an example of each.

**Table 1.** Request forms and corresponding variants

Request form	Form variants	Example
Conventional indirect	Can Could May	- <i>Can I have a tall, nonfat vanilla latte?</i> - <i>Could I get a venti americano, light cream?</i> - <i>May I have a medium caramel macchiato?</i>
Assertion	Will Going to Let	- <i>I will have a large vanilla bean Frappuccino.</i> - <i>We are going to have two tall dark brews.</i> - <i>Let me have a grande vanilla rooibos tea.</i>
Imperative	Give	- <i>Give me a white chocolate mocha with whip.</i>
Want	Want Would like	- <i>I want a grande white chocolate mocha, nonfat, no whip.</i> - <i>I would like a 16oz mocha.</i>
Need	Need	- <i>I need a grande coffee.</i>
Elliptical (verbless request)	∅	- <i>Tall cinnamon dolce latte.</i>

To determine the affect of the independent variables of gender and modality on the dependent variable of request type (shown in Table 1), various statistical tests were conducted in SPSS 22.0 (The Statistical Package for the

Social Sciences), thus providing a quantitative analysis of the data. First, cross tabulations were performed in order to discover the distribution of request types according to the independent variables of barista gender, customer gender, and interaction modality. Second, a Pearson Chi-Square test was conducted to discover the significance of each independent variable in determining the dependent variable, request type, in the recorded Starbucks service encounters. The presentation of the results will be ordered according to the research questions proposed above.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Distribution of request variants in Starbucks service encounters (RQ1)

Research question one examined the distribution of request variants in Starbucks service encounters. Table 2 shows the distribution of the 820 request variants used in the Starbucks service encounters. It includes the request type and the frequency for each request variant.

**Table 2.** Total tokens gathered for each request form

Request Type	Frequency	Percent of Total
Conventional indirect	378	46%
Assertion	134	16%
Imperative	8	1%
Want statement	108	13%
Need statement	30	4%
Elliptical request	162	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>820</b>	<b>100%</b>

The distribution of the 820 instances of requests for service shown in Table 2 allows for the observation of certain trends in the data. First, it is evident that conventional indirect requests comprise nearly half of the total instances, resulting in 46% of the total requests. In this initial distribution of request forms, the data corroborates the idea that ‘conventional’ indirect requests are, as per their namesake, the most commonly used request strategy used in service encounters conducted in American English. Ellipticals (20%), assertions (16%), and want statements (13%) are employed with comparable frequency to one another, while need statements (4%) and imperatives (1%) form a very small portion of the collected tokens. This first look at the data therefore shows that there are a variety of request strategies available to customers and yet the frequencies in which they are employed vary greatly.

Table 3 breaks down the categories according to the modality of the interaction, drive-through versus lobby.

**Table 3.** Distribution of request forms according to modality

Modality ->	Drive	Percent of Total	Lobby	Percent of Total	Total	Percent of Total
<b>Customer</b>						
Conventional indirect	314	52%	64	29%	<b>378</b>	46%
Assertion	85	14%	49	24%	<b>134</b>	16%
Imperative	5	1%	3	1%	<b>8</b>	1%
Want statement	84	14%	24	11%	<b>108</b>	13%
Need statement	17	3%	13	6%	<b>30</b>	4%
Elliptical request	98	16%	64	29%	<b>162</b>	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>603</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>820</b>	<b>100%</b>

The division of tokens by modality, drive-through and lobby, provides a greater degree of detail as to how Starbucks customers use request forms according to the physical context of the interaction. It must be noted that there are significantly more tokens for drive-through service encounters than face-to-face interactions. This is because the researcher could hear all of the requests produced in the drive-through over her headset, whereas she was limited to the requests directed specifically toward her in face-to-face interactions. In spite of the discrepancy of token count for the two modalities, general tendencies may be observed by comparing the percentages of request forms within each physical context. Conventional indirect requests comprise over half of the instances (52%) in the drive-through, followed by elliptical requests at 16%. In face-to-face interactions in the lobby, however, conventional indirect requests and elliptical requests are produced in the same amount (29%). Also of note, assertions occur in greater frequency in the lobby (24%) than in the drive-through (14%) with the other categories remaining similar in frequency across modality.

#### **4.2 Distribution of request variants in Starbucks service encounters according to participant gender (RQ2)**

With basic trends established according to modality, a further division of tokens was made according to both modality of the interaction and gender of the participants as shown in Table 4 in raw numbers and in graph form in Figure 1. This division of the total request instances provides insight as to the influence of gender on request forms when considered in conjunction with the modality of the service encounter.

**Table 4.** Distribution of request forms according to participant gender and modality

<b>Employee/Modality -&gt;</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Customer</b>	<b>Drive</b>	<b>Drive</b>	<b>Lobby</b>	<b>Lobby</b>	
conventional indirect					
M	87	33	14	1	<b>135</b>
F	148	46	48	1	<b>243</b>
assertion					
M	23	10	14	1	<b>48</b>
F	39	13	33	1	<b>86</b>
imperative					
M	2	1	2	0	<b>5</b>
F	1	1	1	0	<b>3</b>
want statement					
M	19	4	9	1	<b>33</b>
F	46	15	14	0	<b>75</b>
need statement					
M	5	1	4	1	<b>11</b>
F	8	3	7	1	<b>19</b>
elliptical request					
M	20	20	43	2	<b>85</b>
F	42	16	19	0	<b>77</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>820</b>

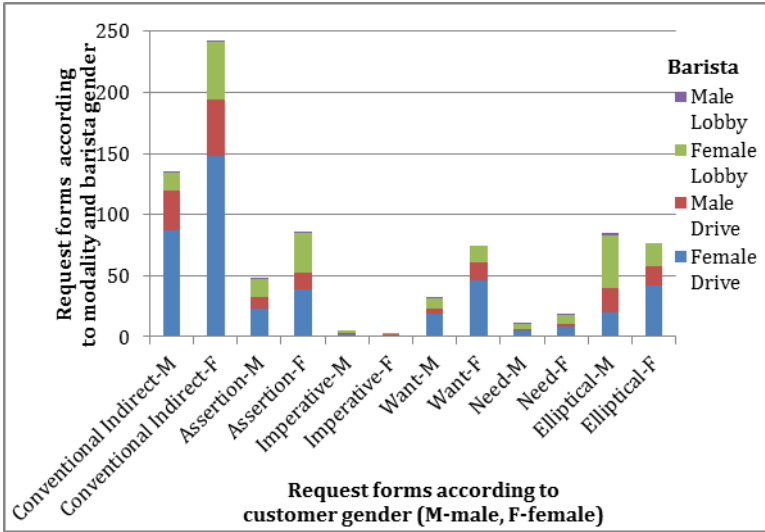
The numbers shown in Table 4 provide a basis for general comparisons of request forms produced by males and females in the two different modalities of drive-through and lobby.

#### **4.2 Distribution of request variants in Starbucks service encounters according to interaction modality (RQ3)**

To aid in the visualization of the data displayed in raw numbers in Table 4, Figure 1 has been provided to portray the effects of modality on request formation. From these data, there are various trends that may merit mention. Firstly, male customers speaking with a female barista in the drive-through used over six times more conventional indirect requests than male customers speaking with female baristas in the lobby. When a female customer ordered a drink from a female barista, the use of conventional indirect requests was used three times more frequently in drive-through as compared to lobby encounters. A trend may therefore be observed in which conventional indirect requests are favored in the drive-through modality, particularly by males, who in face-to-face interactions drastically reduce the use of this form. Another notable occurrence in the data is the differing use of elliptical requests made by male and female customers toward female baristas. While male customers employ



nearly half of the total elliptical requests with female baristas in the lobby, female customers are roughly twice as likely to direct an elliptical request toward a female barista in the drive-through.



**Figure 1.** Distribution of total request forms according to modality and customer gender

Taking both independent variables of gender and modality into consideration begins to provide a detailed picture of the differences of males and female request formation depending on whether the interaction is face-to-face or over a microphone. In order to understand the significance of each of these variables, a Pearson Chi-Square was conducted with results shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Pearson Chi-Square of independent variables

Effect	-2 Log-likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Barista Gender	139.319	4.162	5	.526
Customer Gender	135.158	0.000	0	.000
Modality	135.158	0.000	0	.000
Customer Gender/Modality	157.227	22.069	5	.001

In response to research question two, the Pearson Chi-Square results from Table 5 show the customer gender to be significant, but only in face-to-face interactions, whereas barista gender is rendered insignificant. Modality of the interaction was also shown to be highly significant in determining the request form selected in a particular interaction. This aligns nicely with the results from Table 4 which showed the behavior of male and female customers to differ greatly according to the modality of the interaction. Finally, when customer gender and modality were considered in conjunction with one

another, the Pearson Chi-Square rendered the interaction as significant. As such, just as customer gender and modality of the encounter were statistically significant independent variables when considered individually, when the two were considered together the result was still rendered statistically significant.

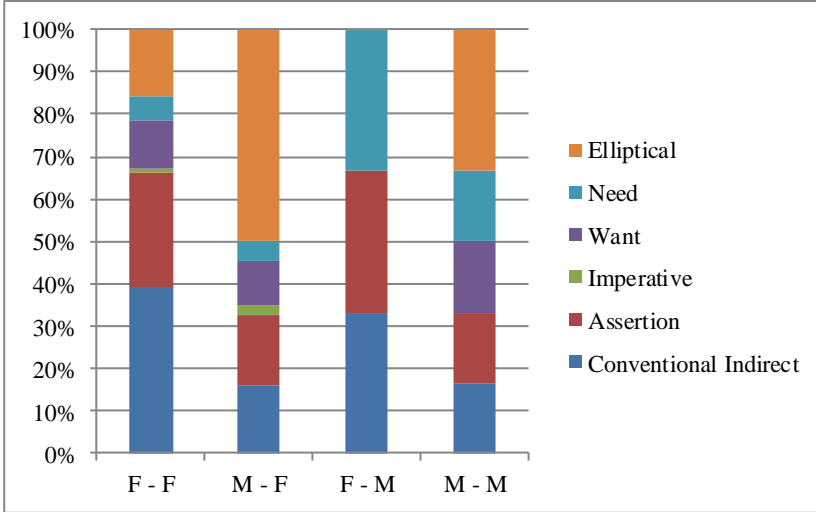
To further understand these results in relation with research question three, a second Chi-Square test was run to determine the effect of modality, comparing the request types directed toward baristas in the lobby with those in the drive-through. Table 5 shows the effect of modality is highly significant, while the results shown in Table 6 provide a more detailed interpretation of the way in which modality affects the dependent variable of request type.

**Table 6.** Pearson Chi-Square of customer gender- modality interaction

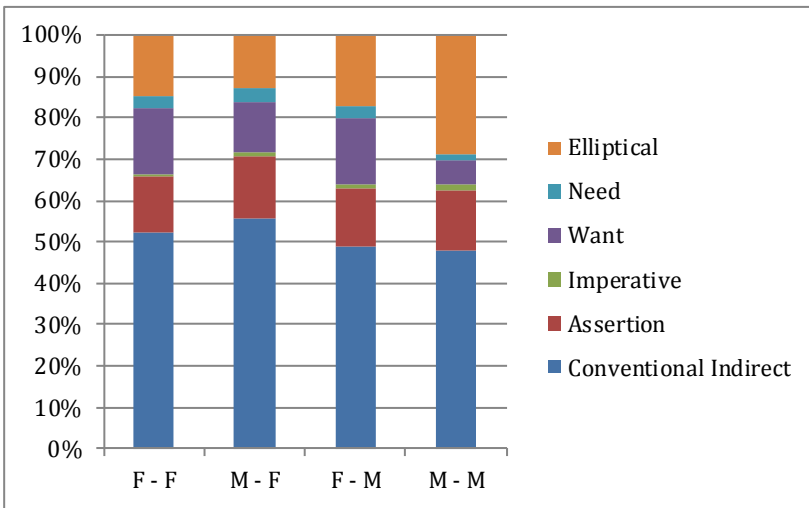
Effect		Value	df	Sig.
Lobby	Pearson Chi-Square	33.400	5	.000
	Likelihood Ratio	34.149	5	.000
	Number of valid cases	218		
Drive	Pearson Chi-Square	5.191	5	.363
	Likelihood Ratio	5.287	5	.382
	Number of valid cases	602		

A more fine-grained analysis of the interaction between the variables of gender and modality, as shown in Table 6, shows that the request form produced by a customer is highly affected by the customer’s gender when in the face-to-face modality in the lobby, but that this difference is not found in the drive-through. The results from Table 6, therefore, allow for a much more nuanced understanding of the way in which the different modalities of a service encounter may elicit unique facets of gender-based linguistic identity, showing that those trends that are evidenced in face-to-face interactions may not be relevant in a non face-to-face encounter.

In order to visualize the distribution of request types according to customer and barista gender with respect to service encounter modality, percentages were taken of request type according to barista and customer gender. These percentages were separated according to modality, lobby vs. drive-through, as shown in Figures 2 and 3 below. Figure 2 shows the request types according to barista and customer genders (customer gender – barista gender) when the service encounter modality is face-to-face. Figure 3 also displays the distribution of request type according to participant genders, but when the service encounter modality is over the drive-through microphone.



**Figure 2.** Request type according to participant genders (customer–barista) in face-to- face service encounters



**Figure 3.** Request type according to participant genders (customer–barista) in drive-through service encounters

A comparison of the distribution of request types in the above Figures shows that, while the request types vary greatly according to customer gender in face-to-face service encounters, this variability is not found in the drive-through where conventional indirect requests are the most common variant employed by both male and female customers toward male and female baristas. This visual representation of the data from Table 6 conveys the

importance of considering the modality of a service encounter when applicable, as the linguistic behavior elicited by each modality is quite different. It must be noted, however, that these are preliminary results that must be supported by further research that includes more tokens for male participants.

In order that any ambiguity caused by the small number of male barista tokens might be eliminated, a final Chi-Square was performed to consider solely the effect of modality when barista gender was held constant, considering only female barista tokens. Table 7 provides the results of the Pearson Chi-Square that tests for the effect of modality on request type when barista gender is held constant.

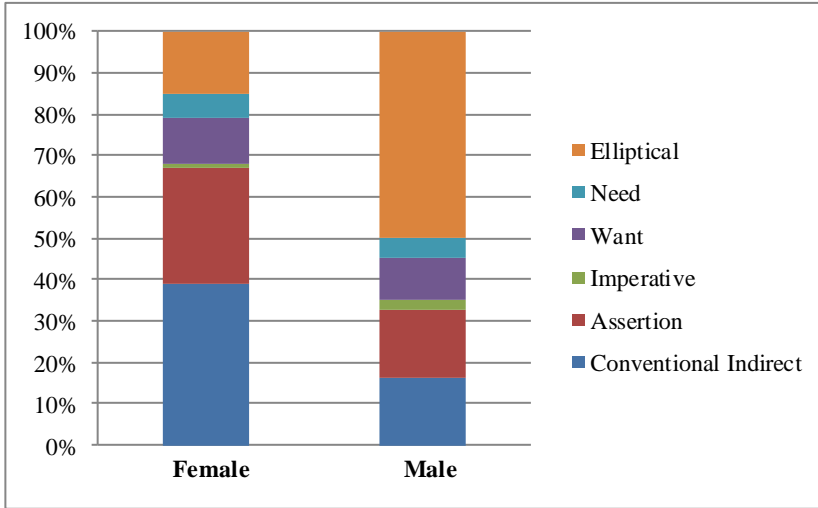
**Table 7.** Pearson Chi-Square of effect of modality in service encounters with female baristas

Effect		Value	df	Sig.
Lobby	Pearson Chi-Square	32.484	5	.000
	Likelihood Ratio	33.106	5	.000
	Number of valid cases	209		
Drive	Pearson Chi-Square	3.098	5	.685
	Likelihood Ratio	3.057	4	.691
	Number of valid cases	439		

The results from this last Pearson Chi-Square test demonstrate that modality has a high effect on the request variant directed toward female baristas by customers. While the distribution of request variants is relatively constant in drive-through interactions, the same trend is not found in face-to-face interactions where request type varies by customer gender (as was shown in Table 5 and Figure 2 above).<sup>1</sup> Having established the reliability of the analysis by holding the barista gender constant, the visual representation of the difference of request types produced according to gender and modality are provided in the Figures below. Figure 4 shows the discrepancy of request forms directed toward female baristas by both female and male customers in face-to-face service encounters conducted in the lobby.

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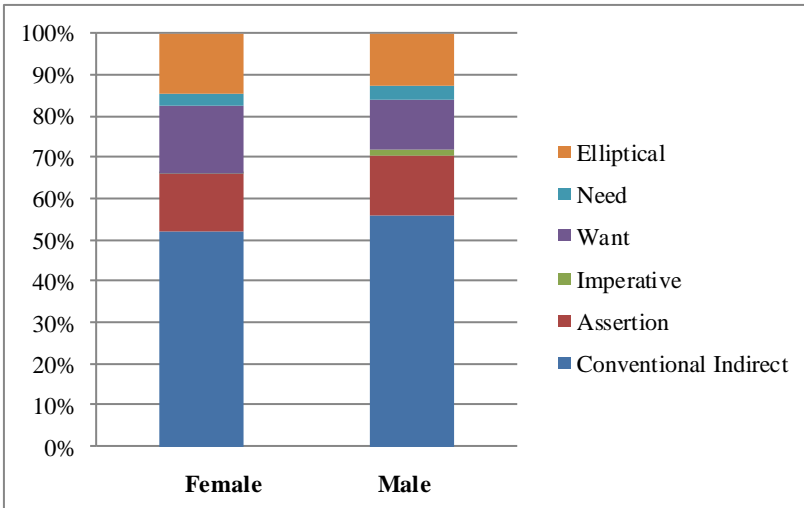
<sup>1</sup> A low number of imperatives yielded small cells (cells containing less than three tokens). Since small cells can sway the results, a subsequent analysis was conducted with the imperative tokens excluded in order to ensure that the results did not change dramatically once the small cells were no longer included. Table 8 provides the results for the analysis of modality in service encounters when the barista gender is held constant as female and the imperative tokens are excluded. Comparing Table 7 (which included the small cell for imperatives) with Table 8 in Appendix A (excluding the small cell for imperatives) shows that the small cells did not greatly impact the significance of the factors and that the initial results which show request type to be significantly affected by customer gender in face-to-face encounters but not in drive-through encounters may be trusted.



**Figure 4.** Request type according to participant genders (customer-barista) lobby service encounters with female baristas

By contrasting the distribution of request variants in the columns in Figure 4, it is evident that there exist clear differences in the use of request forms by male and female customers interacting with a female barista in a face-to-face service encounter in a Starbucks lobby. Females most frequently employ conventional indirect requests, followed by assertions and ellipticals whereas males use a much greater frequency of elliptical requests, followed by assertions and conventional indirect requests. These results, therefore, evidence a high degree of gender-based pragmalinguistic variation in face-to-face café service encounters and provide a point of comparison for the results shown in Figure 5 which shows drive-through interactions between male and female customers with female baristas.

The comparison of Figure 5 with Figure 4 provides a striking visual of the different way in which male and female customers interact with female baristas depending on the modality of the interaction.



**Figure 5.** Request type according to participant genders (customer-barista) in drive-through service encounters with female baristas

While the request strategies vary greatly according to customer gender in lobby interactions, these differences virtually disappear in drive-through requests for service where both males and females use conventional indirect requests with the greatest frequency, followed by ellipticals and assertions. When the visual component of a face-to-face encounter is removed, the variation of request forms ceases to exist as well. These results show that the request forms produced in U.S. service encounters is multifaceted in nature, affected by the gender of the participants involved as well as by the modality of the interaction.

The following section provides a discussion of the results here provided in order to propose possible conclusions as to how the factors of participant gender and modality interact in the pragmalinguistic variation of request forms in service encounters in a U.S. Starbucks café.

### 5. Discussion

In this section, the results presented above will be discussed according to each research question. The first question sought to define the request variants evidenced in the pragmalinguistic variation found in Starbucks café service encounters. The data of the current study correspond with the request variants proposed in previous studies (Fink & Félix-Brasdefer, 2015), as shown in Table 1. As with Fink and Félix-Brasdefer (2015), the current study found the following overarching request forms to be present in the data: conventional indirect, assertions, imperatives, want statements, need statements, and ellipticals. Two differences in request categorization were found between the

current findings and those of Fink and Félix-Brasdefer (2015) regarding request forms. Firstly, there was a lack of implicit requests (e.g. Hi. (said as the customer places a scone on the counter)) in the current data. This is supposed to be due to the fact that in Starbucks the barista nearly always retrieves an item from behind the counter instead of the customer placing it on the counter (Fink & Félix-Brasdefer, 2015, p. 11). Secondly, the category of imperative requests was added as a classification for those requests found in the current study's dataset (e.g. Give me a tall black coffee.) With regard to the frequencies of these variants, results of the production of request variants in Starbucks U.S. service encounters support the findings of Fink and Félix-Brasdefer (2015) who found conventional indirect forms to be the most common of the variants employed followed by elliptical forms as the second most frequent in local café service encounters in the U.S.. The current study supports these same patterns when looking at total numbers. In concordance with Fink and Félix-Brasdefer (2015), the current study also identifies conventional indirect requests as the unmarked request form in U.S. service encounters and supports the conclusion that elliptical requests are common because the service encounter nearly always begins with some form of the question, "Welcome to Starbucks. What could I get started for you today?" posed by the barista. When addressed with such a question, the customer is able to relate the request without a verb since it has already been included in the question directed toward them. Even so, it must be noted that in Starbucks service encounters, the interaction nearly always begins with the barista directing some form of the question given above toward the customer. While this appears to possibly heighten the possibility for elliptical request forms, variation is still prevalent in the data, as shown in Table 2.

Regarding the variation present in the data, results corroborate Barlett's (2005) claim that service encounters do allow for a certain degree of variability, but that there are specific tendencies that can be described as specialized components of service encounter interactions. These findings also demonstrate that the request variants employed in service encounters within the specific context of Starbucks cafés are the same as those used in local café service encounter interactions. As such, the conclusion that the request variants are a result of the type of interaction, in this case service encounters, and not the setting, local coffee shop versus an international corporation's coffee branch. Thus far, results support earlier findings of pragmalinguistic variation evidenced in service encounters, showing similar request variants. The independent factors influencing request variant selection will now be discussed in light of previous findings.

Research question two involved the variation between request forms based on the genders of the participants involved. Recall that there were four possible combinations (Customer -Barista: M-M, M-F, F-M, or F-F). Statistical analysis rendered the barista gender insignificant in request variant selection. The gender of the customer, however, was highly statistically significant in the selection of request variant, as shown in Table 4. Male and

female customers in the current study produced request variants differently as found by Fink and Félix-Brasdefer (2015) in local café service encounters, and by Félix-Brasdefer (2015) in Mexican market sales transactions. In conjunction with Antonopoulou (2001) and Félix-Brasdefer (2015), males employed a higher degree of elliptical requests, whereas females used more conventionally indirect requests. Antonopoulou (2001) attributes this to the way in which males and females perceive service encounters. In this account, males understand service encounters as a transaction that does not require opening and closing exchanges for the participants to maintain face and, as a result, employ more elliptical requests. This trend was supported by the current study. Conversely, females used more conventionally indirect requests. Antonopoulou (2001) states that the females view more interpersonal exchanges between customer and cashier as part of the interaction, thus leading to fully verbalized requests. The findings of the current study also fully support these claims, showing that in Starbucks service encounters, males are more likely to favor verbless requests while females favor fully formed variants. The differences of request form selection according to gender are however further influenced when considered in conjunction with the factor of modality.

The third research question regarded the effect of the modality of the interaction on request forms produced. An initial Chi-square test showed modality to be a highly significant factor in determining request variants when considered independently, as shown in Table 4. A second analysis considering the interaction of modality and customer gender to be highly significant, also shown in Table 4. Request forms were highly affected by customer gender in face-to-face interactions, with females producing more conventionally indirect request forms and males using more ellipticals. This effect for customer gender, however, was not found in drive-through interactions. With regard to the overall predominant use of conventional indirect and elliptical request forms, the data reveal interesting intricacies of use depending on the modality of the interaction. The tendency to use a conventional indirect request is overwhelmingly the most common request strategy in drive-through service encounters. In face-to-face encounters, conventional indirect and elliptical forms occur with the same frequency. A possible reason for this trend may be related to the customer's inability to see the barista towards whom they are directing the request. Impressionistically speaking from my personal barista experience at the time of data collection, customers seem to enunciate more when ordering in the drive-through, often raising their voices well above a normal speaking volume and speaking in a much slower, paused manner. The need for clarity may yield more complete request forms, those with verbs. Not only does this need for clarity seem to result in more complete request forms, but overwhelming in the use of the unmarked request form, conventional indirect, which would render itself the most easily understood. These results, however, must be regarded as tentative and in need of support by future studies due to the scarcity of tokens for male baristas.



Since a lack of tokens did not allow for definitive conclusions to be drawn regarding U.S. service encounters request variation between customers and male baristas, a subsequent analysis was conducted which only considered the effect of modality on the request forms addressed to female baristas. This analysis, shown in Table 6, shows that the gender of the customer only influences the request variants in face-to-face interactions, not those of the drive-through. A visual representation of this difference is shown in Figures 4 and 5. This difference of request form variation may be attributed to the physical presence of the interlocutor of face-to-face interactions. When the customer sees the barista with whom they are interacting, the impact of the physical presence of an interlocutor, regardless of gender, causes the customer to express their own gender through request forms. When the physical presence of an interlocutor is taken away in the drive-through, this expression of the customer's identity through request forms is also removed. Thus, it is concluded that the impact of the interlocutor's presence is stronger in face-to-face interactions, having a greater influence on the way in which requests are formed. These results show that the selection of request variant is a highly intricate matter, depending not only on the gender of the participants, but also the modality of the interaction.

The contributions of the current study to the area of service encounters will now be addressed in light of each hypothesis originally postulated. Firstly, as hypothesized, results corroborate previous findings regarding the wide pragmalinguistic variation according to gender in café service encounters in American English (Fink & Félix-Brasdefer, 2015). Secondly, these data support previous claims that request variants are employed differently by male and female customers. Interestingly, contrary to what was hypothesized, the current study shows no significant effects for barista gender as an independent variable, only for the gender of the customer. The situation proves more complex such that when between gender and modality are considered together there are strong tendencies of request forms. It was anticipated that male customers would interact differently with male and female baristas and similarly that female customers would address male and female baristas with different variants. The current study, however, does not support this initial supposition, rather it shows that males and females have a tendency to use specific request variants based on their gender, and that this is not influenced to a statistically significant degree by the gender of the interlocutor, the barista. The third and final research question and accompanying hypothesis dealt with the modality of café service encounter interactions. It was hypothesized that modality would indeed have an affect on the request variants provided by the customers and this postulation was confirmed by the data. Due to limitations in token numbers for male baristas, the current study looked at the difference in request forms provided in face-to-face encounters versus those in the drive-through while holding the barista gender constant for females. When holding the gender of the barista constant, very strong statistical differences were found among the request variants employed by

male and female customers. The differences between genders were very prominent in face-to-face interactions in the lobby, but neutralized in drive-through encounters over the microphone.

## **6. Limitations**

The present study has provided a first attempt to explore the effect of modality on the pragmalinguistic variation of café service encounters. Future investigations with a more balanced number of tokens for males and females in each modality are needed to confirm the findings here reported. Additionally, research looking at the effect of service encounter modality can be greatly extended to other environments beyond the café context, allowing for comparative analysis to be conducted. One limitation of the current study is the lack of control for priming with the way in which the barista greets the customer and poses the initial question, “Welcome to Starbucks. What could I get started for you today?”. Future studies that take into account the influence of priming are needed. The manner in which the initial greeting and question are posed by the barista (What can/could I get started for you today? What would you like today? What sounds good today?) are likely to have an influence on the request forms produced by customers and must be considered in future research endeavors.

## **7. Conclusions**

The current study supports previous research involving the pragmalinguistic variation of café service encounters by showing that the request variants employed in these interactions demonstrate certain patterns of use while simultaneously showing variability. General tendencies according to the gender of the customer also surface in the data, with males producing more elliptical requests and females using more conventional indirect forms. By focusing on the specific context of a Starbucks café with a lobby and a drive-through, an additional element of interaction modality was considered. An analysis of request variants addressed to female baristas in face-to-face and drive-through encounters, shows that request forms vary according to modality. Face-to-face interactions tend to elicit request forms that are more strongly influenced by gender in the manner described above, a fact which may be attributed to the influence of the physical presence of the interlocutor. These differences of request type according to customer gender were not evidenced in service encounters that take place over the drive-through microphone thus showing that when the physical presence of the barista is lacking, it is the unmarked variant of conventional indirect requests that predominates for both male and female customers. In addition to providing a first look at the effect of the modality of the interaction, the present study also provides insight as to the pragmalinguistic behavior in a little studies region of the Northwest United States.

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## Appendix

**Table 8.** Pearson Chi-Square of effect of modality in service encounters with female baristas and imperative requests excluded

Effect		Value	df	Sig.
Lobby	Pearson Chi-Square	31.781	4	.000
	Likelihood Ratio	32.332	4	.000
	Number of valid cases	206		
Drive	Pearson Chi-Square	1.802	4	.772
	Likelihood Ratio	1.832	4	.767
	Number of valid cases	436		